

VZCZCXYZ7323
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSP #0110 0651215
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 051215Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9021
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS PORT OF SPAIN 000110

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/PD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [OEXC](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: VPP FOR TOBAGO LAUNCHED

¶1. SUMMARY: The Embassy launched its first Virtual Presence Post, VPP Tobago, on February 19 in a ceremony attended by Tobago House of Assembly (THA) officials as well as key members of that island's artistic, education, and religious communities. After the formal launch, representatives from various USG agencies and Embassy Sections held a well-received "open house" to field questions about U.S. policy, visas, educational opportunities, the American Corner, and Fulbright Program. END SUMMARY.

¶2. More than 100 members of the Tobago community, including THA officials, teachers, media, USG program alumni, religious leaders, and business people attended the February 19 formal launch of the Virtual Presence Post Tobago. THA, U.S. Embassy and NGO co-organizer Empowerment Foundation of Tobago (EFOT) representatives spoke at the event. The DCM highlighted the Mission's past, present, and future Tobago-related activities and underscored our wish to increase outreach efforts to the island. Other ceremony highlights included the PAO presenting a well-appreciated explanation of Embassy functions and the donation of a computer to a Tobago library.

¶3. THA Chief Administrator Michael J. Keens-Dumas, in his remarks, welcomed efforts by the Embassy to engage the local community. EFOT's Benedict Armstrong closed the formal part of the ceremony by thanking the USG for setting up the VPP, but also expressing a desire for a consulate for Tobago.

¶4. The formal launch ceremony was followed by a jazz concert performed by the Kelley Johnson Quartet of American Music Abroad. THA Assemblywoman Cynthia Alfred, Deputy Chief Secretary and Secretary of Community Development and Culture, welcomed the

SIPDIS

Quartet's visit and was enthusiastic about continuing cultural exchanges with the USG. (NOTE: Earlier in the week, the Kelley Johnson Quartet conducted a workshop for Tobago students and, the next day, invited the students on stage during their public concert at Mason Hall Secondary School. Quartet members promised to stay in touch with the students through electronic mentoring. END NOTE)

¶5. In an effort to reach out to the wider Tobagonian community, following the concert, the Embassy held an Open House with representation from each Embassy section, as well as the American Corner and the Centers for Disease Control. The general public was invited to ask questions about the Embassy's work and browse available literature. A Black History Month biography collection, donated to the American Corner earlier in the day, was viewed with significant interest by the public and will undoubtedly help attract visitors to the American Corner in Tobago. Throughout the afternoon, the student advisor and Consular representative were inundated with questions, reflecting the thirst for information among the Tobagonian population.

¶6. COMMENT: The Embassy's strong representation at the VPP Tobago launch and Open House was appreciated by local officials and the general public, with the former expressing interest in further

collaboration. Print and electronic media coverage was very positive, though Newsday (circulation 73,000) picked up on Mr. Armstrong's remarks on the wanting a USG physical presence in Tobago and entitled its article "Tobago wants U.S. Embassy." Leveraging the existence of the VPP, we intend to maintain an active outreach effort to Tobago, albeit tempered somewhat by budgetary and personnel constraints. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN